BLACK SALT GAMES

The Art of

DREDGE

Defining the Style

The original prototype for DREDGE had a simple, low-poly aesthetic. This was because we only had a week or two to develop the prototype. The resulting contrast between simple cartoon-like visuals and horror elements was surprisingly charming and effective. We knew we wanted to keep that same charm going forward.

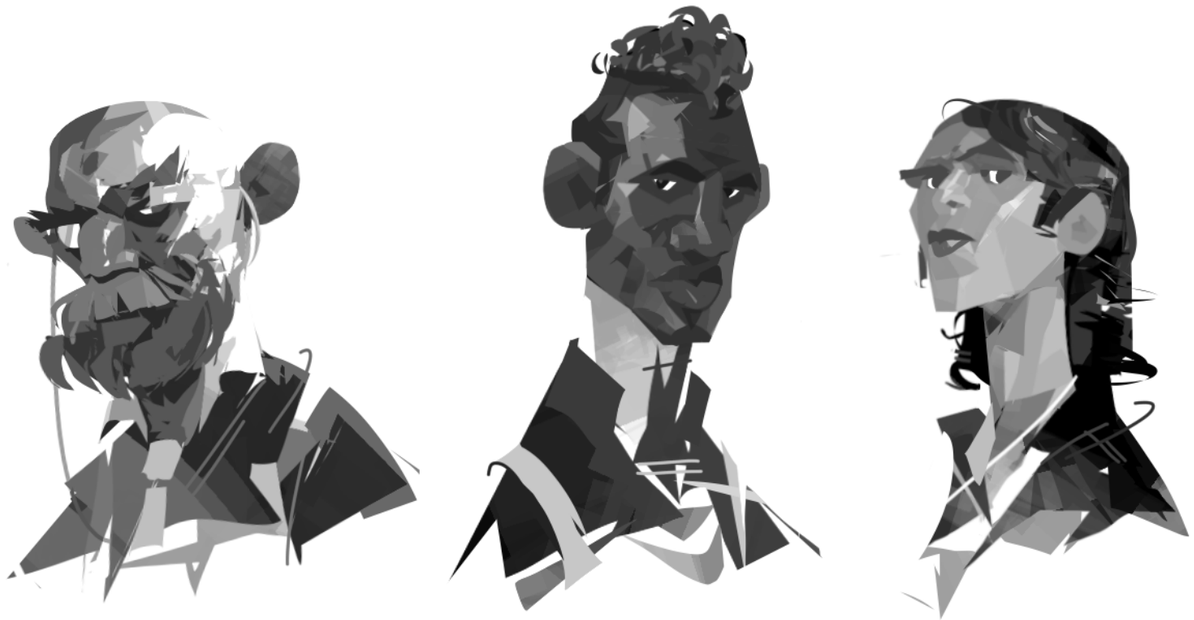
A screenshot from the prototype of DREDGE.

The first job was to take the 3D art we had and increase the detail. We wanted to keep rounder shapes to a minimum to create a harsher look while keeping the simple style. Below is an example of how the 3D art changed while increasing in detail.

These images were created while trying to define the 2D look of DREDGE.

We were after something that would compliment the 3D art while retaining a flat 2D look. Any outlines were removed for that reason.

An early concept illustration made to explore the look of Greater Marrow.



Further style explorations made during early development.

Something we tried briefly was using heavy shadows in the 2D designs. But because the in-game art style featured flatter lighting it stood out as too different.

While designing The Fishmonger we decided that early versions seemed far too healthy for someone living in our world. The final design is more emaciated.

The process for each character started with a grayscale sketch focusing on major shapes and tonal relationships. From there, base colors were blocked out and then the painting began on top of that.

Throughout this process The Fishmonger was used as a reference to guide all style decisions.

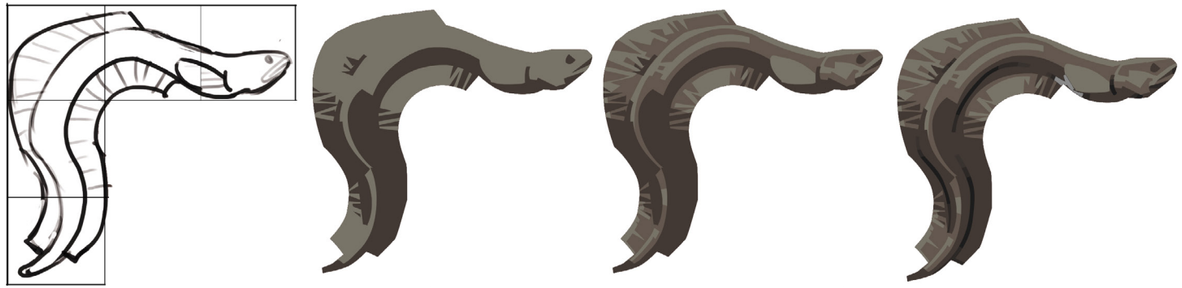
The Mayor of Greater Marrow is one of the first faces to greet you on your journey. The uneasy smile on his face was important for setting the tone for DREDGE. The exact shade of white used for his eyes significantly altered how unsettling he looked.

There are a few times in DREDGE where you see the player character. These images show some early sketches and the final design of that character.

Cargo and Fish

The same ideas and techniques used for 2D characters were used to create all the equipment and fish in the game.

This sequence shows the process of creating a fish in DREDGE.
Starting with a sketch, we work out how to get the fish into the shape we want.
It then goes through several steps adding (or sometimes removing) details.



The sketch is colored and shadow shapes are blocked in.

The shadows are refined and then extra colors are added.
It is then painted over. Highlights are added last.

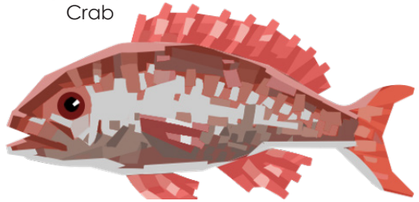
In total, 128 unique fish illustrations were created for DREDGE - which is a lot more than the 30 we had originally planned. Most of the regular fish are based on real fish and almost all fish have at least one aberration.

Blue Crab

Cod

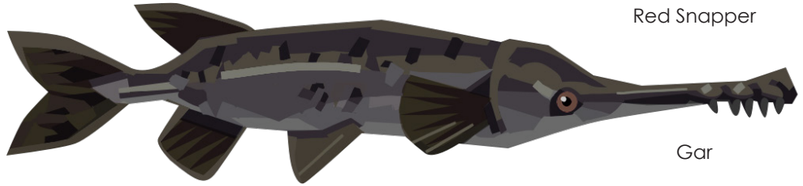
Common Crab

Aurora Jellyfish



Red Snapper

Blue Mackerel



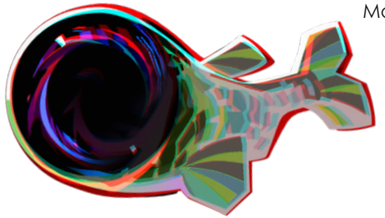
Gar

Bursting Anglerfish

Grotesque Mackerel

Brood Squid

Many-Eyed Mackerel



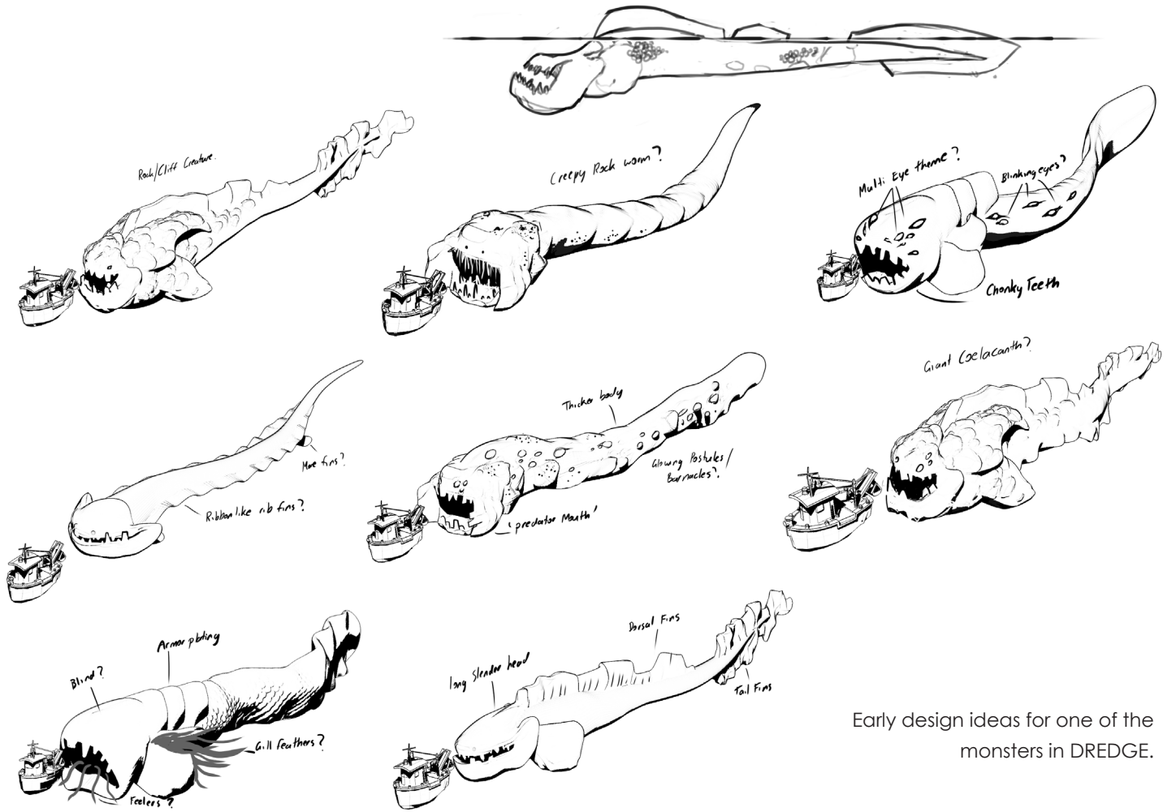
Voideye

Sallow Sailfish

Gnashing Perch

Monsters

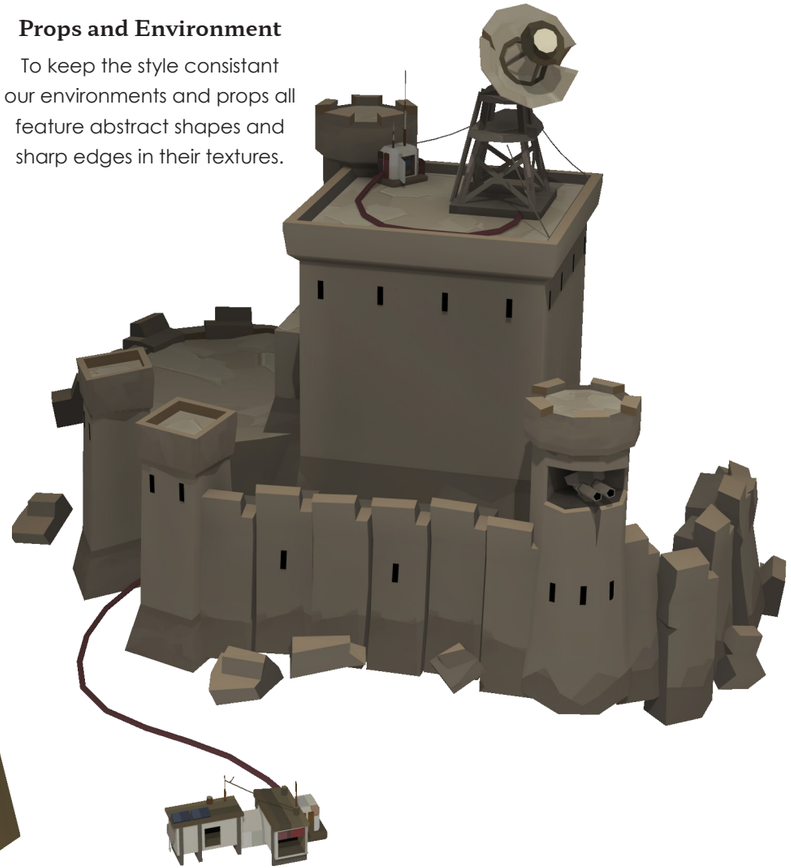
There are many creatures that lurk beneath the waves in DREDGE. The following pages show some concepts for a few of them.

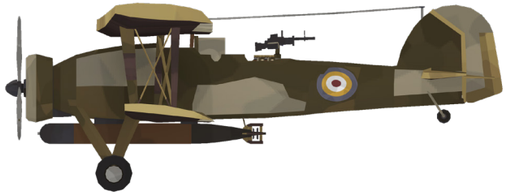


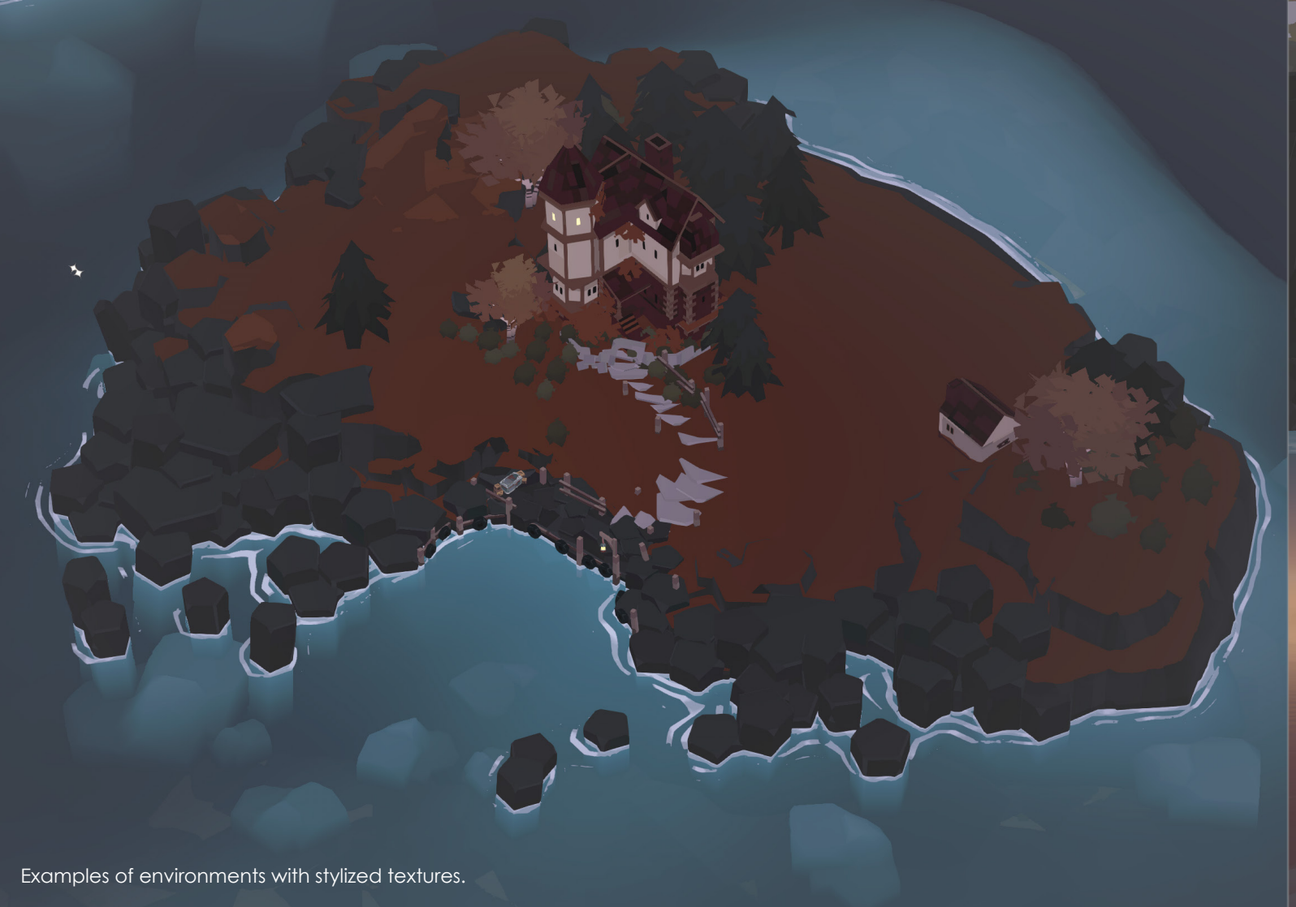
Early design ideas for one of the monsters in DREDGE.

Props and Environment

To keep the style consistant our environments and props all feature abstract shapes and sharp edges in their textures.



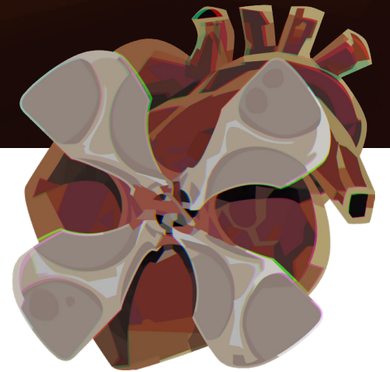




Examples of environments with stylized textures.

The Supernatural and Occult

Otherworldly entities are a big part of DREDGE. Visually, they take inspiration from the term we use to describe them: “Aberrations” Chromatic Aberration is a colour distortion that occurs in photography when a lens fails to focus all colors at the same point. In effect, the colors split, causing what looks like a very colorful and blurry outline.



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